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ABSTRACT

In 1972 the Canadian government launched its first domestic communications satellite, Anik A, which relays direct broadcast television and telephone messages to northern communities. The impact of television on Inuit life has raised issues and concerns pertaining to native language broadcasting, media access and control, and cultural identity among the Inuit people. In the past, without native-language information, Inuit could neither adapt their own institutions nor those brought north by southern Canadians. Two experimental communications satellites, Anik B and Hermes, now provide interactive audio and video links, and Inuit communities are being encouraged to experiment with interactive broadcasting as a means of controlling their acculturation and development through local-level initiative, integration, and cohesion. These experiments with communications satellites among the Inuit may re-direct patterns of institutional communication which have cemented over time and maintained outside control in northern communities. Twelve references are listed. (Author/MER)

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Communication and Control in the Canadian North:

The Role of Interactive Satellites

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Electronic media have assumed important roles in the processes of directed change, including those termed development and modernization. Until recently, the relationship between electronic modes of communication and social change was generally understood within a paradigm which correlated economic growth and social development.[1] Mass media played a vital role in stimulating economic processes and providing information for adaptive social change. This dominant paradigm had obvious appeal in Canada where, in the post-World War II period, there was heightened awareness of northern resources and native conditions. When Canada embarked on a domestic satellite program in 1969, one of the major rationales was the benefits it would bring to the Far North.

Canada's satellite system has been in operation for eight years and new northern media have had effects upon the Inuit other than those anticipated. The Anik system provides high quality telephone service to the 25,000 Inuit living in 57 communities in the Arctic. But it also transmits 16 hours a day of English language television programming through the services of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The network broadcasts 112 hours of weekly television programming. Less than one hour per week is in the Inuktitut language and very little more is about the North. CBC is currently received in 21 communities with a total population of 17,496 and additional communities are slated for service. A CBC survey of

Inuit in the Keewatin Region of the Arctic found that in March, 1979, 9 out of 10 people own a television set and watch an average of 3.5 hours of television per day. (Fraser 1979).

Inuit fear that the content of the television service is posing a powerful threat to Inuit language and culture. In addition, the South-North structure of the system may well be increasing southern domination and making Inuit more marginal to the authority of non-native presence. These concerns are justified. During the past five years, the limitations and effects of the dominant paradigm have been widely recognized.[2] We no longer assume that quantitative growth leads to qualitative development. The contrasting historical experience of centre and marginal economies reveals that, because centre economies draw upon resources from marginal areas, growth in marginal economies takes place in relation to the expansion of empires. In Canada, this pattern was noted by economic historian Harold Innis (1956c.1930) in 1930. His later writing (1972c.1950;1951) relates the development of empire to significant transformations of communication modes. Discussing dominant cultural trends, Innis suggests that modes of communication which make it easy and inexpensive to transmit culture over space lead to the development of centred monopolies of knowledge. Authority is hierarchically-organized and extends to marginal locations, supporting new structures of control and their expansion through empire.

James Carey (1967, 1975) has expanded Innis' approach to include electronic media as a factor influencing social organization. Together, they emphasize the need for historical and ethnographic research to understand the impact new modes of communication have on localized areas. This approach is important to Inuit in the Canadian Arctic, where, since 1978, experiments have been conducted using the interactive capacity of satellites. Within the cross-cultural and historical patterns of Inuit-non-native interaction in the North, direct-broadcast and interactive transmission have very different implications for the development of Inuit communities.

The North in Perspective

From the native perspective, the critical nexus of northern social history arises in the interface of Inuit and non-native cultures. Northern development has been dominated by resource exploitation since the early contact period. New modes of transportation and communication motivated the expansion of European empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and attention focused on the Arctic as a potential route to the Far East. But as the interests of empire turned to resource development, this became the dominant theme in northern development. The North became a marginal economic area, providing resources to economies centred first in Europe and, after the nation of Canada formed, in the South.

Contact occurred through change agents who moved into the North to act upon the motives of outside institutions, or change agencies. Accounts of change generally follow the sequence of explorers, whalers, missionaries, traders and government personnel, notably the police and including various specialized personnel in contemporary settlements. The relative importance of change agencies has shifted, of course. But from an historical perspective, the period beginning just prior to the present century and ending with the Second World War is most relevant to current interaction patterns which form the context for the introduction of electronic media. Three major agencies dominated this period: the missionaries, the traders and the police. These groups inititated hierarchically-structured interaction patterns in Inuit communities by establishing contact agents, individual Inuit delegated by non-natives to act as community go-betweens, directing native activity to suit the needs of the agencies and supported by them through access to technology, trade goods and authority.

> With the establishment of trading posts, police stations, and missions during the early part of the century, a number of new roles were assumed by small numbers of Eskimos: namely, the trader's helper, the catechist, and the special constable. These people did not realize it, but they were the forerunners of new kinds of groupings, for Eskimo society. (Vallee 1968:110)

Waves of change agencies introduced pluralism and new criteria for leadership to Inuit society. New interaction and

residence patterns emerged. With the provision of settlement services in the post-World War II period, "... it would appear that exploitative agencies were replaced by supportive ones" (Brody 1975: 31). However, the patterns of Inuit-non-native interaction established by early agencies continued to define Inuit-non-native relations.

> ...there is a fundamental continuity between what can be termed the pre-and post-administrative periods. Whites in the North have always been intent on causing change; in realizing these changes, they have dominated the Eskimos, and they continue to do so... The basic relationship between Whites and Eskimos has therefore remained the same. The material conditions of life have changed ...but these changes have remained in the hands of southerners; it is they who decide what Eskimos need or should need, and it is they who decide how these needs are to be met (ibid).

Throughout the contact period, non-native control of social and economic institutions has been maintained through English-language knowledge monopoly, non-native technology and trade goods. Communication modes and technologies are critical to this process. Until the introduction of radio and airplanes in the 1920's, communication in the North was limited to face-to-face interaction. The inter-community system transferring written or verbal information was defined by transportation routes.

Missionaries introduced syllabic and roman orthography systems for writing the native language in the late 1800's. By 1910, probably 98% of the Inuit in the Eastern Arctic were literate in Inuktitut. Different orthographies applied to a

language basically the same throughout the North reinforced dialect differences and regionalization. At the same time, Inuit did not become functionally literate. Written information did not allow Inuit to adapt their own institutions or participate in those brought North. Prior to 1972, only 9 secular books and 4 periodicals were published in Inuktitut. And, according to Jenness (Mayes 1972), oral tradition in the form of professional storytellers were no longer evident by 1924.

One would assume that radio provided needed information, but it was hardly more useful for Inuit adaptation. Broadcast and HF radio were very important to northern change agencies by the 1930's. The CBC Northern Service formed in 1958 to provide consistent radio service to the North. However, the first Inuktitut broadcast occurred in 1960 and, by 1972, only 17% of CBC shortwave Northern Service was in the Inuit language.

Television has followed the same pattern. In 1967, television programming was introduced to the first of 17 communities in the Western Arctic through delayed transmission of video-tapes in 4-hour packages. This service was extended to one community in the Eastern Arctic in 1972: Frobisher Bay. The same year, Canada launched its first domestic communications satellite. 'Frontier package' television included no native language programming and satellite transmissions have limited Inuktitut broadcasts to less than an hour.

As social change in Inuit communities accelerated after the 1940's, two simultaneous, non-complementary communication

systems operated in the North; one among the non-native change agents; one among the general Inuit community. Information passed between the two through contact agents who remained marginal to outside agencies as the pace of northern development increased more significantly after 1960. "Today southern institutions stand at the political centre of northern settlements," (Brody 1975: 39) and Inuit are economically dependent upon and socially defined by these institutions. "The essentially tragic quality of ... most of the entire hinterland of the north, is the fact that development, as represented by the kind of outside capital investments... produces either no results at all, or worsens the conditions of the native population, when they are considered as local communities" (Cohen 1970: 24).

Expanding to serve change agencies, electronic media has contributed to non-native control in the North. "Most of the important sources of messages are not natives of the Arctic, and...most messages flow into the region from outside...the political and social position of the senders...determines their authority...and decision-makers of the most important channels of information are almost exclusively white, and located outside of the Arctic." (Mayes 1972: 84)

Direct telephone services now provide important inter-community links in the North, and both broadcast and community radio are expanding to play important roles in the cohesion and initiative of local communites. But without significant access to or control of television, participatory development

on the community level is limited. The expansion of English-language schools during the past decade has put additional pressure on Inuit communities. In Baker Lake, Norman Attungala told a 1980 hearing of the Canadian Radio Television Commission (CRTC):

> ...my main concern and I am sure it is the concern of many people in the north, is that you have two audiences watching television, one group that does not understand a word of English and the other does and most of the programming on television is in English.

As young Inuit learn English and more southern information reaches the North, Inuit gain little more control over the pace and direction of changes affecting their communities. And they recognize the threatened loss of their language, values and the leadership of their older people. Two Inuit organizations have participated in interactive satellite experiments in an effort to redress this situation. These experiments are currently in progress. Inuit hope that they will lead to a new kind of northern television service in the Inuktitut language.

Interactive Experiments in the North

In 1976, Canada launched the first of two experimental satellites. Hermes, a 12 GHZ satellite, provided for a two-year program of technical and social experiments. In the third year of operation, Taqramiut Nipingat Inc. (TNI), a native communications society, worked in cooperation with government agencies to mount a two-month experiment in

Northern Quebec. Five communities in the region already had telephone service via the Anik A satellite. TNI proposed that the Hermes capability provide communications service to an additional three communities, and the two systems be joined together in Sugluk. This design established a radio network among eight Inuit communities in Northern Quebec, none of which had television service.

The TNI Hermes project broadcast two hours of Inuktitut programming between 5:00 and 7:00 P.M. every other day. Using conference call capability, all the communities could participate in the broadcasts. Inuit response to the experiment was highly enthusiastic. TNI planned half-hour taped program segments for each broadcast, but community participation lead to extended discussion of issues and services. Toward the end of the project, several 4-hour programs were broadcast, including one in which Inuit spoke candidly with Prime Minister René Levesque (Hill and Valaskakis 1979).

The Hermes program demonstrated the technical feasibility of communications operations in the 14/12 GHZ band width and their application to improved services in the areas of health care, education and social development. The Department of Communications (DOC) proposed a follow-up program using the Anik B satellite to test operational feasibility of telecommunications services. Building upon the Hermes experiments, the Anik B program intends to establish the viability of proposed new telecommunications services.

Taqramiut Nipingat Inc. and Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC), the national Inuit organization, have mounted Anik B projects, hoping that these projects will "lay the groundwork for the implementation of an operational communications system structured to meet Northern Needs" (Green and Simailak 1981: 7).

The Inukshuk Project

In September, 1978, Inuit Tapirisat began a 3-year Anik B project named Inukshuk, meaning "'likeness of man', the name for the stone cairns that marked the nomadic routes of the Inuit and served as one of the first communication aids." (ibid.:1) ITC secured funding of $1.9 million from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs to provide for the training of Inuit staff, an Arctic-wide videotape distribution system and Anik B satellite operation from September 29, 1980 extended to May 31, 1981.

The Inukshuk Project uses the Anik B satellite to link six communities in three Arctic regions (with different time zones and dialects) through one-way video and two-way audio. The teleconferencing network provides audio-video transmission from Frobisher Bay, and video receive/audio transmission from the five communities of Cambridge Bay, Baker Lake, Eskimo Point, Igloolik, and Pond Inlet, the maximum number of ground stations that could be included given the spot beam design and channel restrictions of the satellite.

In each community, Inuit can participate in the system

from either of two locations: a small meeting room, such as the community council office; or a large meeting room equipped with a 3' by 4' video screen, such as the community hall. Five of the six communities have local broadcast transmitters to rebroadcast the signal to individual homes. Igloolik, which has twice refused CBC's offer to provide television, decided not to install a local transmitter and to limit reception to the hamlet office, adult education building and the school.

The system is designed to allow home reception, but not home participation in order to test whether the interactive capability of the television medium encourages discussion of issues on the community level. The design provides flexibility of reception for community users who can direct the signal to any combination of meeting rooms and/or home reception; and each community can transmit locally.

Inukshuk airs a mixture of teleconferencing and broadcasting, including live and pre-taped programs, during 17 afternoon and evening hours each week. "A major objective of the project is to operate the Inukshuk network in such a way that program orientation and control can come from any of the six ground station communities, not just the video transmit community of Frobisher Bay" (ibid.:11). Both video-taped and interactive programming are produced in the audio-only communities with the help of community co-ordinators and filmmakers working with the project.

Inukshuk transmits almost entirely in Inuktitut, but

includes some English programs relevant to the North, and English translations for Inuit in Central Arctic when dialect differences become a problem.

The project is in progress, but program schedules for October and November, 1980, indicate the potential of the satellite network:

> Interactive programs have been held among the Hunters and Trappers Associations to discuss game management and control and among the Health committees to exchange information on preventive health. The government of the Northwest Territories has met with the local education committtees for input on education standards and curriculum development. The adult education programming includes a 10-part series on how to cook food from the land and its nutritional value. Elected representatives have met with their constituents over the network to discuss matters that are before the Territorial Assembly. Programming done for local transmission only has emphasized community issues. Inukshuk staff in both Baker Lake and Frobisher Bay televised an all-candidates' debate prior to municipal elections with a live phone-in show. Baker Lake provided detailed, up-to-the-minute coverage of the election returns on the evening of the election. (ibid.: 12).

In addition to meetings, the project is testing the use of the network for adult education, children's education and Inuit broadcasting. In response to communities, a variety of pre-taped programs have been made on Inuit culture and lifestyle, both traditional and contemporary. And through the system a great many films made about Inuit have become available to them, including Flaherty's famous "Nanook of the North," which has been sub-titled in Inuktitut.

Already the Inukshuk Project has demonstrated the potential of communications technology as an effective tool in Inuit communities. It has made training, experience and production

facilities available to Inuit filmmakers and has distributed video-tapes to settlements throughout the North. But most important, the satellite network and local transmission capability provides the technology for Inuit to participate in local and regional administration, information dissemination, education and planning.

Implications for the Future

Interactive technology will not erase the political and economic reality of the Canadian North. Resource exploitation will continue to reinforce its marginality and influence its development. An increasing amount of southern television programming is becoming available off satellite to maintain English language knowledge monopoly; and the capability of new transportation and communications technologies reinforce centralization and bureaucratic control.

But Inuit today are fully aware of the role communication plays in the process of Northern social history and the contemporary context. Inuit Tapirisat stated at its 1980 Annual Assembly that "the introduction of television has meant the last refuge of the Inuit culture, the home, has now been invaded by an outside culture with values which the Inuit question from time to time," (ibid.: 14). The national Inuit organization is insisting on the right to community control of broadcasting signals and the urgent need for an Inuktitut communications network. Interactive satellites can provide the information and channels for participatory social change.

This technology may allow Inuit a realistic opportunity to adapt their own social institutions and participate in those brought North. Interactive satellites may play an important role as Inuit act to gain a measure of control over their lives and communities. And Inuit use of this technology may emerge as an important alternative to the type of development stimulated by communication applied within the dominant paradigm.

Notes

[1] See Lerner, D. The Passing of Traditional Society. New York, 1958: Free Press: Pye, L., ed. Communication and Political Development. Princeton University Press; and Schramm, W. Mass Media and National Development. Stanford, Ca. 1964: Stanford University Press.

[2] See Rogers, E.M., ed. Communication and Development: The Passing of the Dominant Paradigm, Communication and Development Critical Issues. Beverly Hills, Ca. 1976: Sage Publications.

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